

God so loved the world

BTrinity - 2024

Isaiah 6:1-8; Psalm 29; Romans 8:12-17; John 3:1-17

May 26, 2024

A woman has a dream.
She describes it like this.

It was so terrible and wonderful all at the same time, she says.
I was back at a national park we had visited.
As I walked down a trail,
the woods opened to a large open vista complete with snowcapped mountains.
The wind was moving across the tall pale green grass
making it look like an ocean of gentle waves.
The lake looked like it had diamonds dancing on it
as the sunlight reflected on the water.
As I stood and looked at all of this,
I felt like I was beholding the very perfection and purity of God.
I was overcome with awe and wonder.
Then, I was invited to step into it, to become part of it,
but I felt I couldn't, I felt like I wasn't ready for it,
because I might change it some way,
I might somehow contaminate it.

I had a kind of life review as I thought of all the reasons
this scene should not be trespassed upon by me – or anyone.

I felt that if I entered into this glory,
I would be taking my world with me.
It would be like noxious gas polluting the air
or a cancer cell being introduced into a perfectly healthy body,
or like a harmful chemical being poured into the lake water.

But then, I realized that the scene
– the clear air, the dancing water, the ground –
was all approaching me.
I was already breathing that air,
feeling the cool wind blow over the sparkling water,
standing with bare feet on the firm ground,
with the tall grass brushing against me.

Isaiah tells of a mystical encounter with the throne of God.

It gives witness to humankind's encounter with the Divine and God's breaking in and transforming life as we know it. God is always present, moving gently - and sometimes dramatically- in our lives. Still, there are moments that change everything. Isaiah is overwhelmed as he encounters the God of the universe.

In the presence of the Holy, Isaiah is acutely aware of his personal fallibility and the social injustices he has taken for granted as normal. In Isaiah's dream, as he witnesses angels praising the Creator, he realizes that the whole earth is filled with God's glory, not just the throne in the temple. His senses are perhaps aware for the first time of the majesty of creation and Creator, and he experiences the world as God-filled.

Isaiah's ecstasy is short-lived: God challenges him to enter, not the perfection of the vision, but the turmoil of the political and national scene of his day. Mysticism leads to mission: God connects with us. God touches us. God calls us. In Isaiah's time God needs people who will call the nation of Israel back to God – the God of social justice, of economic equality, of sound foreign policy, of relational hospitality, and political civility.

Who will speak for God? Who will be God's companion in healing the world?

"Here I am," stammers Isaiah. Transformed and cleansed, touched, Isaiah embraces a new vocation, to call the nation back to God's ways.

Paul writes to the early Christians in Rome as though they, too, are at the edge of a life defining moment. And he calls them forward into a Spirit-filled life. They are not to live focused on the frailty of their flesh – but they are being led by the Spirit to be children of God! And they are given the first fruits of the Spirit.

Pentecost Sunday, last week, we focused on the great feast day of the Jews, and the feast day it became for Christians. The first fruits of the harvest, the best grain and livestock were brought to Jerusalem and offered at the Temple.

Usually the worshippers are required to bring the first fruits of their labors as an offering. But Paul turns it around and says that before God calls us, God gives us God's first fruits. We are given the Spirit, which is the first fruits of the life in Christ (8:23) so we can move into the God-filled world that awaits us.

And, in our gospel today we hear the same thing. God so loved the world that first he gave his only son.

Rather than wait for us to get good enough to enter the scene of God's realm, God reaches out to us and touches us, our lives, and meets us where we are.

Today is Trinity Sunday. A compelling way that the mystery of the Trinity is being expressed these days comes through quantum physics. I surely don't understand it! But I can share a bit of it that has helped me. Rather than the idea of the Trinity being three separate persons who sit side by side, The Trinity is three truths about God that are in perfect relationship together.

We'll take them apart to try to understand it better.

The presence of God is primordial.
The presence of God is expressive.
The presence of God is unitive.

The first person of the Trinity is the primordial energy of being that came before all, is above all, beyond all – and yet fills all.

We Judeo-Christians have found and used what language we can – like Creator, Love, Father/Mother of all, King, Lord. I've read that all religions have some sense of this infinite, transcendent God, without whom nothing exists.

The second person of the Trinity is what or who is expressed through this glorious Presence that fills all. How it becomes particular in this world. Our names for this person have been Word, Son, Prince of Peace, Savior, Field of Dreams, Emmanuel (God with us), Jesus. I like the image that Jesus is the icon God gives to humanity as a gift; God's ultimate expression for humanity; The religious icons we are familiar with are not flat two-dimensional pictures. They are created to be openings into the mystery of God, the infinity of God. Jesus is given to us as an icon we can move through

into what God would have us discover and come to know.
Jesus is God's icon of humanity who shows us how we are to experience ourselves.
Jesus is a living icon which we are invited to look into and through;
with whom we find we can relate, and befriend,
so that we might learn the joys of being fully alive in God.

The third person of the Trinity is the life that comes forth
from that being fully alive, fully joined, fully immersed, in union with, in God.
We call it the Breath or Wind of God, the Spirit, Fire,
that empowers us to join God on the dance floor.
It is burning embers touching our mouth,
the ground that is already beneath us, upholding us,
the spark of our imagination when quickened by the primary spark of life,
and the courage to dance and play and work with each other
in ways that open us and our world to that field of grass, that throne room,
a whole creation made new and coming toward us.

The woman's dream, Isaiah's vision, Paul's call to be children of God,
Jesus' words – for God so loved the world –
They all say to us that we do belong
and that God in all God's glory
presses upon us to come into our lives –
to give us a life that is infused with wonder and blessing.
We are changed by God's presence, coming upon and within us,
by God's word placed upon our lips,
by God's first fruits of the Spirit,
by God's first loving us.